

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 /088 W
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9123
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
USUN NEW YORK 386

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGUI 1770

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, US, CT
SUBJ: JOURNALISTS DETENTION: US-CAE RELATIONS

REF: STATE 194752 (NOTAL)

1. RESPONDING TO A THREE DAY OLD REQUEST FOR A MEETING PRIOR TO MY RETURN TO WASHINGTON, PRIME MINISTER PATASSE RECEIVED ME ON THE MORNING OF AUGUST 17. DCM SMITH ACCOMPANIED ME. PRIME MINISTER'S CHEF DE CABINET ALSO SAT IN.

2. I BEGAN MY PRESENTATION BY NOTING THAT SINCE MY DEPARTURE ON LEAVE JULY 15 SEVERAL SERIOUS INCIDENTS HAD TROUBLED OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. FIRST THERE HAD BEEN THE DETENTION OF THE TWO JOURNALISTS, THEN THE EXPULSION OF THE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER AND FINALLY THE CANCELLATION OF THE VISIT OF THE BASKETBALL TEAM, WHICH WAS PRIVATELY SPONSORED ON THE AMERICAN SIDE. I SAID I WANTED TO SHARE WITH HIM MY CONCERN AND THAT OF MY GOVERNMENT AT THESE EVENTS. I NOTED AS POSITIVE THE FACT THAT IN EACH CASE WHEN SOMEONE HAD BEEN ARRESTED, HE HAD ULTIMATELY BEEN RELEASED.
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THE PROBLEM, HOWEVER, DID NOT END THERE. NOW THAT BOTH JOURNALISTS HAD BEEN FREED, THERE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE ARTICLES RECOUNTING THEIR EXPERIENCES IN PRISON IN THE CAE. AS THE PRIME MINISTER WAS AWARE, THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAD ANNOUNCED FROM THE OUTSET THAT IT ATTACHED GREAT IMPORTANCE TO HUMAN RIGHTS. AMONG THESE WAS THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS. THE ARTICLES WOULD ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE USG TO THE CAE

AND TO ITS' PRISON SYSTEM. THIS COULD NOT BUT HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR RELATIONS.

3. I THEN TURNED TO THE SUSPICIONS AND ACCUSATIONS LEVELED AGAINST THE USG. I SAID THAT I HAD ALREADY MENTIONED THIS SUBJECT TO THE EMPEROR. WASHINGTON WAS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE ACCUSATIONS THAT THE USG HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN THE FEBRUARY 1976 ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AND THE RUMOR THAT THE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER WHO HAD BEEN EXPELLED HAD ENGAGED IN ESPIONAGE. I REPEATED MY ASSURANCE TO THE EMPEROR THAT WE HAD NOT IN ANY WAY PARTICIPATED IN THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT. I ALSO EXPLAINED THAT SINCE ITS INCEPTION, THE PEACE CORPS HAD BEEN PROHIBITED FROM HAVING ANY RELATIONS WITH AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES. THE VOLUNTEERS WORKED FOR THE CAE GOVERNMENT; THEY DID NOT AND NEVER WOULD ENGAGE IN ESPIONAGE.

4. I SAID THAT THIS AMBIANCE OF SUSPICION TROUBLED ME. I HAD WORKED HARD DURING MY 18 MONTHS IN THE CAE TO BUILD A LEVEL OF COOPERATION WHICH WOULD SERVE AS A CONCRETE FOUNDATION FOR OUR RELATIONS WITH THE CAE. PEACE CORPS, AID AND EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS HAD ALL INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY. HOWEVER, COOPERATION HAD TO BE A TWO-WAY AFFAIR. IF AMERICAN CITIZENS FELT THEY WERE IN DANGER AND COULD NOT WORK, COOPERATION WOULD BE DIFFICULT. IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT WE FIND WAYS TO REASSURE OUR CITIZENS AND AVOID INCIDENTS IN THE FUTURE. IT WAS IN THIS SPIRIT THAT WE HAD PROPOSED A CONSULAR CONVENTION TO PROVIDE CONFIDENTIAL

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A FRAMEWORK IN WHICH TO HANDLE CONSULAR PROBLEMS. I COMPLETED MY PRESENTATION BY FRANKLY ASKING THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS ON HOW WE SHOULD PROCEED TO OVERCOME THESE DIFFICULTIES AND TO RE-ESTABLISH THE COOPERATION FOR WHICH HIS GOVERNMENT AND THE EMBASSY HAD WORKED.

5. THE PRIME MINISTER REPLIED THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAD BEEN VERY TOUCHED BY AND REGRETTED WHAT HAD HAPPENED. HOWEVER, THE WORK OF THE JOURNALISTS HAD AFFECTED THE NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY OF THE CAE. THEY SHOULD HAVE DECLARED THEMSELVES AS JOURNALISTS AND SHOULD NOT HAVE HIDDEN THEMSELVES AS TOURISTS. HE AND THE EMPEROR WISHED TO PRESERVE RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. THEY HAD BEEN VERY IMPRESSED WITH PRESIDENT CARTER'S GOOD INTENTIONS AND HIS EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

6. PATASSE SAID HE WAS CONVINCED THAT GOLDSMITH HAD BEEN HELD BECAUSE HIS NATIONALITY WAS NOT KNOWN. THE EMPEROR HAD RELEASED GOLDSMITH IN PATASSE'S PRESENCE IN A FAMILY ATMOSPHERE. BOKASSA HAD PUT A CAR AT GOLDSMITH'S DISPOSAL AND HAD PERSONALLY CALLED THE BANGUI CONTROL TOWER TO ASK THE AIRCRAFT TO WAIT FOR GOLDSMITH.

7. THE PRIME MINISTER THEN APPEALED TO ME AND TO THE USG TO DO WHATEVER IT COULD TO PREVENT AMERICAN JOURNALISTS FROM INSULTING THE HEAD OF STATE, WHICH CONSTITUTED INTERVENTION IN THE CAE'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. HE REPEATED THIS APPEAL SEVERAL TIMES. AMERICAN JOURNALISTS COULD SAY WHAT THEY WANTED ABOUT PRESIDENT CARTER, BUT NOT ABOUT THE EMPEROR WITHOUT AFFECTING BILATERAL RELATIONS.

8. I REPLIED BY REITERATING THAT THE USG COULD NOT CONTROL THE AMERICAN PRESS. I ALSO NOTED THAT WHEN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS TRAVELED ABROAD THEY USUALLY MET WITH AMERICAN OFFICIALS. SOMETIMES THESE REPORTS WERE DISTORTED. I HAD INFORMED THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND THE PRESS SPOKESMAN OF THE IMPERIAL COURT OF THE ARRIVAL OF ALL THREE JOURNALISTS (DAVID LAMB AS WELL AS RANDAL AND GOLDSMITH). I ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE JOURNALISTS MAY HAVE BEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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INSUFFICIENTLY AWARE OF THE SENSIBILITIES OF THE EMPEROR. THEY HAD HAD AN INTERVIEW WITH THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION, BUT NO ONE HAD TOLD THEM THAT THEY WERE NOT FOLLOWING THE LAW OF THE LAND. IF THE GOCAE FELT THAT THE JOURNALISTS HAD INTERFERED IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE COUNTRY, THE USG HAD CERTAINLY NOT ENCOURAGED THEM TO DO SO.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGUI 1770

9. THE PRIME MINISTER THEN SOUGHT TO REASSURE ME ABOUT AMERICANS WORKING IN THE COUNTRY. THE GOCAE WAS NOT AGAINST THEM, AND THEY SHOULD BE ASSURED THAT THEY ARE "AT HOME." HE MENTIONED IN PARTICULAR THE STEPS WHICH HAD BEEN TAKEN IN THE MISSIONARIES' FAVOR.

10. COMMENT: PATASSE WAS ABSENT MUCH OF LAST WEEK AND ARRIVED BACK ONLY HOURS BEFORE GOLDSMITH WAS RELEASED. HE IS PROBABLY NOT FULLY AWARE OF THE INTERROGATIONS, MUCH LESS OF HOW GOLDSMITH WAS TREATED. HE WAS ALSO UNAWARE OF EITHER RANDAL'S ARTICLE OR THE AP STORY ON GOLDSMITH'S RELEASE (STAIE 194283). I TRIED TO ALERT HIM TO THE FACT THAT FURTHER ARTICLES WOULD BE PUBLISHED. I ASKED HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT NOT TO OVEREACT.. (IN MAKING THIS STATEMENT I HAD IN MIND AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE QUOTE ATTRIBUTED TO ME IN THE AP ARTICLE ON GOLDSMITH'S RELEASE, WHICH IS A SLIGHTLY GARBLED AND OUT OF CONTEXT VERSION OF WHAT THE EMPEROR SAID TO ME AT THE CONCLUSION OF MY PRESENTATION TO HIM AUGUST 1. THE PUBLICATION OF SUCH MATERIAL FROM PRIVILEGED AND CONFIDENTIAL CONVERSATIONS CAN ONLY HAVE FURTHER NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR POSITION HERE.)

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11. AS I LEFT MY MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, CAE RADIO ACCOSTED ME WITH A REQUEST FOR COMMENT. I SAID THAT WE HAD MADE A TOUR D'HORIZON OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS IN A SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP AND MUTUAL COOPERATION ON THE EVE OF MY RETURN TO WASHINGTON FOR CONSULTATIONS. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION WHETHER OUR RELATIONS WERE GOOD, I SAID THAT OUR RELATIONS HAD ALWAYS BEEN GOOD AND THAT MY JOB AS AMBASSADOR WAS TO MAINTAIN ON AN OPEN AND FRANK BASIS, THE BEST RELATIONS POSSIBLE. THE MEETING AND MY COMMENTS WERE LEAD ITEMS ON AFTERNOON NEWS. QUAINTON

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